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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [RU](#) [IC](#)

SUBJECT: Iceland: Russian activities in region a growing concern

Refs: A) 07 Reykjavik 247

B) IIR 6 872 2046 06 (DTG 231540Z AUG 06)

C) 07 Reykjavik 322

Classified By: Amb. Carol van Voorst for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Russian foreign policy continues to irritate and puzzle the Government of Iceland. In the hour-long special on Russia, broadcasted by an Icelandic television channel on January 15, Russian Ambassador Tatarintsev claimed that recent Russian foreign policy moves are tied to Russia's desire for a multipolar world, a notion threatening to "American military and political circles that want to dictate their political will to everybody else, and we Russians will never allow it." The Ambassador's remarks did not win any fans at the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs, particularly when Tatarintsev accused the Government of Iceland of "hanky panky" in unfairly excluding Russian manufacturer Kazan from procurement of new search and rescue helicopters for the Coast Guard here. While the Russian Embassy here may be pleased for having aired their point of view, they may have miscalculated just how poorly received it would be among the government and public. END SUMMARY.

Russian Public Diplomacy: Not Quite Warm and Fuzzy

12. (SBU) Icelandic TV Channel 2 devoted its hour-long newsmagazine "Compass" on January 15 to Russian foreign policy, both in a global sense and regarding Iceland in particular. The first segment of the show focused on the resumption of long-range aviation (LRA) activity by Russia beginning in the summer of 2007 (Ref A) and centered on the visit of the Compass crew to Engels Air Base in Russia, where most of the recent LRA flights near Iceland have originated. (Note: Though Compass noted that the Russian Embassy facilitated their crew's travel to Engels as well as to the Kazan helicopter manufacturing plant (para. 4), the assumption here is that the trip was largely Russian-funded. Compass and Channel 2 are "flat broke," in the words of one local media commentator. End Note.) During the visit, bomber crews spoke in glowing terms of Iceland's beauty, which they noted during their circumnavigations of the island. The crews also downplayed any threat to Iceland from the flights, and avoided any direct answer to concerns raised here regarding any possible danger to civil aviation.

13. (U) The show's second portion turned to the broader question of recent Russian activities on the global stage, and how President Putin plays at home and abroad. The segment gave Russian Ambassador to Iceland Viktor Tatarintsev ample speaking room. In his most provocative comments, Tatarintsev opined: "What we are advocating for is to have a multipolar world...there will not be any superpower that thinks it can do whatever it wants to with everybody else as its smaller servants. It will not be that way and the Americans know that. Therefore, they are concerned with the growing power of

Russia, and we will become much stronger. It is a real threat to Americans, not the American population, but a threat to American military and political circles that want to dictate their political will to everybody else, and we Russians will never allow it. It is pretty simple and it is as simple as that."

¶4. (U) The show wrapped up with a lengthy explication of the Icelandic Coast Guard's (ICG) SAR helicopter procurement efforts. Starting in summer 2006 (Ref B), Tatarintsev has repeatedly claimed that the Government of Iceland has unnecessarily shunned Russian offers to present Kazan's MI-172 helicopter as an option for the ICG.

The Compass crew traveled to Kazan's manufacturing facility in Tatarstan, and after devoting considerable screen time to the MI-172's capabilities and its advocates, concludes that the aircraft would not meet ICG needs as well as other options on the table. Nonetheless, Tatarintsev complained that his embassy has never received a written reply to GOR offers of assistance and dismissed MFA responses that answers were provided orally. Terming the handling of Kazan's offer and the recent Iceland-Norway agreement to pursue a joint SAR helo procurement plan "hanky-panky," Tatarintsev closed the program with the pledge that Russia "will not allow" such discrimination to go forward.

Icelanders Not Impressed

¶5. (C) In a January 16 meeting on an unrelated matter, Icelandic MFA Permanent Secretary Gretar Mar Sigurdsson told the Ambassador that he had repeatedly discussed the SAR helicopter issue with the Russian Ambassador and was greatly irritated by Tatarintsev's claim that the MFA had not answered the mail. Sigurdsson further noted that he found Tatarintsev's explanation about Russian foreign policy neither comforting nor convincing. Separately, MFA contacts have mentioned to Pol Chief their bewilderment at both the aims of the Russian Ambassador's TV appearance as well as Russian goals in general.

¶6. (C) Comment: When Tatarintsev took up his posting here in summer 2006, he made a point in several interviews of mentioning his love of Reykjavik's swimming pools and other Icelandic cultural touchstones, leading many to believe this was a "new kind of Russian Ambassador." With his comments to the press on the LRA resumption in August 2006 ("These flights are just something that Icelanders will have to get used to,") and in the January 15 Compass episode, many here now believe Russia and her envoy are again showing their true colors. Icelandic anxiety over Russian intentions worldwide and in the North Atlantic neighborhood will continue to grow, translating directly into greater interest in robust defense and security ties with the U.S. and NATO. (Ref C).

van Voorst